

NOSB Livestock Committee - Synthetic Methionine Recommendation

Draft 1-30-05

Background:

A petition has been submitted to the NOP requesting that the use of synthetic methionine in poultry diets be extended past the current sunset date of October 1, 2005. The basic arguments presented by the petitioners include:

Research on organic alternatives to synthetic methionine is incomplete. Projects in progress show promise but more time is needed to assure science is sound. No clear solution is available at the present time.

Even if science had identified viable organic alternatives to synthetic methionine, they would not yet be available in sufficient quantity.

Sufficient dietary levels of methionine are a necessity for organic poultry production from an economic, animal health/welfare, and environmental standpoint.

Methionine is not a growth promoter. It is a necessary dietary requirement essential to maintain the health of poultry.

Feed ingredients that provide methionine include soybeans, field peas, white corn gluten, potato protein, seed meals (sunflower, flax, and hemp), quinoa, alfalfa meal, fresh pasture, and casein. Insects and earthworms are also rich in methionine.

Research into natural methionine production through extraction and fermentation continues. A natural source of methionine feed additive would be allowed according to current National Organic Program standards.

Production systems and cultural practices, including selection of breeds and pastured poultry production, may obviate the need for synthetic methionine. Research projects are underway to examine alternative feed sources, alternative production systems, and alternative breeds.

The Livestock Committee concurs with the petitioners that it is desirable to eliminate the use of synthetic methionine from the organic poultry industry. We support continued intense and good faith research efforts to eliminate synthetic methionine from organic poultry diets.

Recommendation:

After careful consideration and discussion of the merits of the petition, the NOSB Livestock Committee recommends the use of synthetic methionine in organic poultry production be extended to October 1, 2008 to provide time for thorough research on organic alternatives to be completed. This recommendation follows inclusion allowances provided in 205.603 Synthetic substances allowed for use in organic livestock production (d) as feed additives.

A temporary variance petition for the allowance of the use of non-organic feed ingredients in organic poultry production for research purposes was also submitted by the petitioners. The requested variance would allow the feeding of non-organic feed ingredients for research purposes. The variance would require approval by NOP, be limited to trials of 1,000 birds or less, require immediate and full disclosure of research findings, and expire October 1, 2008. If the variance is granted, the birds would be able to be labeled and sold as “organic.” The Livestock Committee recommends that this request be rejected. This Committee cannot support a request to feed non-organic feed to birds that would be labeled and sold as “organic.”

Committee vote:

6 yes, 0 no, 2 absent